

“No Saved Rounds

A mechanized infantry company deployed to a local training area for a live-fire exercise. Following the exercise, the company conducted a force-on-force training exercise supposedly using blank ammunition. Unfortunately, one rifleman mistakenly loaded a full magazine of live rounds, and shot an opposing-force (OPFOR) soldier.

What happened?

After completing live-fire training, the company commander instructed his platoons to clear all weapons and move to the live-fire tactical assembly area (TAA).

One infantry squad leader directed his squad to clear their weapons, and then he performed a brass-and-ammo check of trouser-cargo pockets, load-bearing vests (LBVs), and ammo pouches. The squad then intentionally placed their magazines, still containing live ammo, back into their ammo pouches or LBVs for the movement to the TAA.

The platoon leader conducted a second check of the squad's weapons to ensure they were clear. After clearing all weapon systems, the company moved to the TAA, where they downloaded and turned in their remaining live ammunition. The squad leader then visually inspected the squad's magazines. This was only a cursory check, where the soldiers merely showed the squad leader their empty magazines. Neither the platoon sergeant nor the squad leader checked the soldiers, their ammo pouches or vests for brass and ammo. Consequently, one of the soldiers still had a 30-round magazine loaded with live ammo.

The next morning, the infantry squad was task-organized with another company for a blank-fire, multiple integrated laser engagement system (MILES) exercise against an opposing force (OPFOR). Seventy-two hours into the exercise, the platoon received a fragmentary order (FRAGO), directing them to cross the line of departure at 2100 and to destroy OPFOR in sector.



During movement, the platoon encountered an OPFOR anti-armor ambush, and the infantry squad dismounted to conduct a hasty attack. After the attack, they mounted the BFV, where one soldier, who had run out of blanks, requested and received a full magazine from another squad member.

When the platoon encountered a second ambush, they again dismounted to duke it out with the OPFOR. While preparing to conduct their second attack, the infantry squad encountered a lone OPFOR soldier. The soldier with the borrowed magazine fired two rounds at the OPFOR soldier, and he fell to the ground. Believing that the OPFOR soldier was “over-acting the MILES games,” the squad continued their mission.

A few moments later, members of the OPFOR found one OPFOR soldier lying on his back. Initially, they thought maybe a tracked vehicle had driven over him because he was unresponsive and had no apparent vital signs. The soldiers on the scene notified the chain of command and, in turn, requested a medevac helicopter. The soldier was flown to the hospital, where doctors pronounced him dead.

After the medevac helicopter departed the accident site, the soldier who had fired two rounds cleared his weapon; at that time, he realized his weapon was loaded

or Brass”

with live ammunition. He immediately notified his chain of command.

Why did it happen?

The company commander directed subordinate leaders to conduct thorough brass-and-ammunition checks at the live fire TAA. However, the squad leader conducted the line out prior to turn-in. Later in the day, when the ammo turn-in was completed, the squad leader didn't conduct a thorough inspection. The platoon sergeant and platoon commander also failed to ensure that the squad complied. Therefore, because of a failure to follow procedure and a repeated lack of supervision, a rifleman was able to carry a magazine fully loaded with live ammunition from a live-fire range to a force-on-force exercise.

During the approximate 72 hours between the live-fire exercise and the mishap, the platoon failed to conduct their pre-combat checks (PCCs). This was another missed opportunity as these checks included thoroughly inspecting magazines and other equipment.

The loaded magazine had been handed off in the back of a vehicle traveling under blackout conditions. The soldier that received the loaded magazine was unable to tell that it was loaded with live ammunition. He inserted the magazine into his weapon, and when his squad encountered the OPFOR soldier, he aimed in and unknowingly fired two rounds of the live ammunition at the OPFOR soldier. ☸

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Photo by Cpl. Rick O'Connor



After completing a live-fire exercise, ensure leaders conduct thorough brass and ammunition checks *after* ammunition has been turned in. To do this, leaders need to know how many magazines Marines initially brought to the field. Often during a line out, some Marines will hold up six magazines and others will have only one or two. Those with “missing magazines” claim these magazines were “left in the barracks.”

This practice stems from the re-qualification ranges where two magazines are required. Marines get in the habit of carrying only a couple of magazines and discover other creative uses for empty magazine pouches.

In truth, Marines often leave magazines behind or bury them in their packs. In either case, squad leaders and platoon sergeants will not know how many magazines were brought to the field or lost. ☸



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